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THE

TRUE PENITENT PORTRAYED

IN

A PRACTICAL EXPOSITION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PSALM:

TO WHICH IS ADDED

THE DOCTRINE OF REPENTANCE,

AS DECLARED

In Acts xvii. 30.

BY

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CONTENTS.

SECTION		PAGE
I.	Design of the work	9
II.	General character of the Psalms	9
III.	The character of David	10
IV.	The fall of David	11
V.	Conviction and repentance of David	13
VI.	The true penitent takes refuge in God's mercy	15
VII.	The true penitent trusts in the Divine mercy only as exercised through atonement	17
VIII.	The conscience of the true penitent is thoroughly awakened and convinced of sin	18
IX.	In the case of the true penitent this conviction is accompanied with deep and abiding sorrow for sin	21
X.	The true penitent mourns for sin, chiefly as committed against God	22
XI.	The true penitent justifies God in his own condemnation	24
XII.	The true penitent bewails the sin of his nature as well as of his life	25

SECTION PAGE

XIII. The true penitent regards the possession of a sinful nature as in itself sinful and blameworthy, and as deserving God's wrath and curse..... 28

XIV. All genuine repentance is spiritual, heartfelt, and sincere..... 31

XV. The true penitent feels that his having sinned against knowledge is an aggravation of his guilt..... 33

XVI. David's exercises, to this point, summed up and improved..... 34

XVII. The true penitent looks to atoning blood as the only medium of forgiveness..... 35

XVIII. The true penitent desires the comfort of pardon, and the joy of conscious reconciliation to God..... 41

XIX. The true penitent longs for a sense of the Divine forgiveness and favour..... 44

XX. The true penitent desires sanctification as well as justification; longs for the renewing and purifying influences of the Holy Spirit..... 45

XXI. The true penitent desires steadfastness in duty, but feels that he is dependent therefor wholly upon Divine grace..... 49

SECTION PAGE

XXII. The true penitent dreads the withdrawal of the Divine presence, and especially the loss of the Spirit's influence..... 51

XXIII. The true penitent longs for peace with God, and the joy of his salvation..... 54

XXIV. The true penitent desires deliverance from the bondage of sin..... 55

XXV. The true penitent offers vows of thanksgiving, and testifies his gratitude for recovering grace by seeking the conversion of sinners..... 56

XXVI. The true penitent repeats again and again his prayer for deliverance from the guilt of sin..... 59

XXVII. The true penitent delights in the exercise of praise..... 60

XXVIII. The true penitent makes little account of external observances in comparison with right exercises of heart..... 62

XXIX. The true penitent is penetrated with a profound sorrow for sin, which he regards as more acceptable to God than all mere ceremonial observances..... 63

XXX. The true penitent desires and prays for the prosperity of Zion..... 64

SECTION PAGE

XXXI. The true penitent loves and prizes the external worship of God, chiefly as it is an expression of the inward exercise of faith, repentance, and thanksgiving..... 67

XXXII. Conclusion..... 77

THE DOCTRINE OF REPENTANCE.

I. The Duty of Repentance..... 86

II. The Authority which enjoins the Duty..... 96

III. The Time for the Duty NOW..... 98

IV. The Urgency of the Duty..... 101

V. The Universality of the Duty..... 102

VI. Application of the Doctrine of Repentance... 104

COMFORT FOR THE PENITENT, (A Fragment.)..... 109

PSALM LI.

1 HAVE mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin *is* ever before me.

4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, *and* be clear when thou judgest.

5 Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

6 Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden *part* thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Make me to hear joy and gladness; *that* the bones *which* thou hast broken may rejoice.

9 Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

11 Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me *with thy* free Spirit.

13 *Then* will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

14 Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: *and* my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.

15 O LORD, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.

16 For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give *it;* thou delightest not in burnt-offering.

17 The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

18 Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem.

19 Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt-offering and whole burnt-offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.

THE TRUE PENITENT PORTRAYED.

SECTION I.

Design of the Work.

It is proposed, in the following pages, to present a portraiture of the anxieties, the griefs, the desires, and the resolutions of the true penitent, as they are exhibited in the fifty-first Psalm, the most eminent of the Psalms termed penitential.

SECTION II.

General Character of the Psalms.

While the child of God reveres and loves every part of the divine word, there are portions of it which are peculiarly precious to him. Among these portions may be numbered the Psalms in general. These breathings of ancient piety contain a most

instructive exhibition of Christian experience, a signal manifestation of the inner life of the believer. Here we behold the conflicts of nature and grace, of the old man and the new. Here are the groans of guilt, the struggles of conviction, the breathings of holy desire, the confidence of faith, the delights of communion with God, and the joys of love and hope.

SECTION III.

The Character of David.

The character of David is one which awakens the believer's sympathy, draws his affection, and commands his homage. He sees, with admiration, upon the throne of Israel, a prophet-king; a man who, amidst the blaze of war, the cares of state, and the splendours of royalty, is still the child of faith; who talks of God and religion to his ministers and captains; who prays before his officers of state; who bemoans his corruption, complains of him-

self, passes from joy to sorrow, and sorrow to joy, and wavers between hope and fear; and who, escaping from the pomp of a throne and the flatteries of a court, retires to his closet, communes with his God, strikes his harp, gives his tears leave to flow, and, rapt into the enthusiasm of inspired devotion, sees future ages, anticipates the triumph and glory of the church, and, catching the beams of the latter day, prophesies and praises more like a seraph than a man.

SECTION IV.

The Fall of David.

But, alas! this sublimated spirit can stoop to earth again, as we learn from the Psalm before us, than which there is perhaps no one of all the number which is read by the believer with more interest or emotion. This saint, so purely ardent, can burn with unhallowed fire. This generous monarch, who could spurn revenge,

spare an implacable foe, and even weep over his untimely fall, though it opened his own way to the throne, can, under the assault of sore temptation, contrive murder, practise deceit, reach forbidden joys through treachery and crime, and purchase the wife of a subject with the blood of a friend.

Christians understand this mystery. It is sad and humiliating to them, but not incredible or inexplicable. And, while they stand in solemn meditation over the fallen king, each smites upon his own breast, and exclaims: "But for the grace of God, David's fall were mine."

The effect of this memorable transgression may be traced through all David's subsequent history. It appears both in the events of his life, and in the state of his soul. It is the latter of these points which we propose now specially to contemplate.

SECTION V.

Conviction and Repentance of David.

When the prophet Nathan had delivered his message to David, and withdrawn from his presence, the fallen and convicted monarch seems to have retired to his chamber, full of remorse and anguish. Pondering the message he received from God, he found an arrow in his heart. Awakened from the stupor which had held him so long insensible, and which, as Calvin suggests, seems like an infatuation of Satan, he saw and felt what an evil and bitter thing he had done. Alone with God, he poured forth his soul in unreserved confessions, fervent prayers, and solemn vows. In this plaintive but most instructive Psalm, we have the exercises of his mind on that occasion fully and clearly laid open to our view. God has permitted us to hear the cries of his stricken and repentant servant; not to gratify a vain curiosity,

and still less to lead us to a self-complacent and self-applauding contrast; but to exhibit, for our admonition, the bitter consequences of indulged sin; to show us how a godly and a gracious repentance works in a renewed heart; to hold out hope to such as are struggling under the assaults of temptation; to furnish the fallen with an antidote to despair, and to guide the forlorn and sinking spirit of the backslider and the wanderer through David's repentance to David's pardon, restoration, and peace.

Without further preface or introduction, let us come to the Psalm itself, and seek to draw from it the lessons which it is suited to convey.*

* The inscription of the Psalm is thus translated by Dr. J. A. Alexander: "*To the Chief Musician. A Psalm. By David. When Nathan the Prophet came unto him, as he* (i. e., David) *had come unto Bathsheba.*" On this, Dr. Alexander has the following comment: "The first inscription was particularly necessary here, to show that the Psalm was designed for permanent and

SECTION VI.

The True Penitent takes Refuge in God's Mercy.

VER. 1, 2. Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

These verses contain the prayer which forms the theme and burden of the Psalm. Without any mention of his past services or sufferings in the cause of religion, though in this respect a person of extraordinary merit, David at once betakes himself to the Divine benignity. He makes God his refuge. In this he shews that he knew God.

public use, since it might otherwise be regarded as expressive of mere personal emotions. It has reference to the one great crime of David's life, noted as such in the inspired history itself (1 Kings xv. 5), and involving the guilt of both adultery and murder. See 2 Sam. x. and xii. The significant repetition of the phrase *came unto* is lost in the English and most other versions. *As* is not a mere particle of time, simply equivalent to *when;* but suggests the ideas of analogy, proportion, and retaliation."

To an unregenerate man, convinced of sin, but left under its power, God is a terror. All the peace which such a man ever had, lay in his insensibility to his own guilt. Take these away, and God appears gloomy as night, all cloud and darkness. Even a believer, while under the sharpness of conviction consequent upon some grievous fall, finds it hard to draw nigh.

But David was no ordinary believer; and, although weighed down under the deepest sense of the most dreadful sin, he flees directly to God; lays hold upon the Divine perfections; pleads God's "loving-kindness" like one who had experienced his readiness to pardon and receive the penitent; casts himself upon his "tender mercies," as if he knew their "multitude;" and sues for forgiveness in the "blotting out of his transgressions," even as a record of crime or a register of debt is cancelled when the crime is expiated, or the debt discharged.

Here we see the ultimate ground of all human hope. It is mercy; sovereign mercy; mercy abounding to the guilty and the miserable. The earnest appeal, on the part of the Psalmist, to the Divine compassion and clemency, is, in effect, a confession of his guilt, and the righteous condemnation ensuing thereupon. The particular form of the appeal, too,—a plea for pardon "according to" the Divine mercy, that is, in proportion to it,—is to the same effect. It is a confession of the greatness of the suppliant's guilt, since that guilt required infinite mercy to forgive it.

SECTION VII.

The True Penitent trusts in the Divine Mercy only as exercised through Atonement.

But David does not rest on this perfection in its absolute form, that is, as it enters essentially into the being and character of God. The faith of this eminent believer, as indeed of the Israelitish church,

was far from being so indefinite and vague. He looks to the Divine mercy as exercised in a manner which frees sinners from the guilt of their transgressions; that is, as exercised through an atonement for sin. His hope and expectation lies in this, that the God of infinite mercy is able thoroughly to wash the penitent from his iniquity, and to cleanse him from every stain. But this God can do only through a propitiatory sacrifice. The blood of Christ alone, the appointed and accepted Lamb of God, can purge the soul, wash away its guilt, blot out transgression, pacify the conscience, and reconcile us to God.

As this topic will come up again when we reach the seventh verse, we will pass it for the present.

SECTION VIII.

The Conscience of the True Penitent is thoroughly Awakened and Convinced of Sin.

VER. 3, 4. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have

I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

David's conscience was now thoroughly aroused. The language of his heart, as well as of his lips, was: "I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me." Conscience, even in the godly, has intervals of almost total insensibility and inaction. It is sometimes silent for a season, and seems to behold all our conduct, like one in whose mouth are no rebukes. But whoever, having sinned, reckons upon the continuance of this quiet, is mistaken. The sensibility of conscience will be re-awakened; and, as in other cases of suspended sensation, it will return with redoubled acuteness. Then, the past must undergo revision; and all those actions which seemed, at the time, to pass unnoticed and without reproof, will be recalled with a severe and persistent scrutiny.

This was David's experience. He had gone on for months, though doubtless outwardly observant of the law, in a course of secret but outrageous wickedness, which, even at this distance of time, makes us shudder; and he seems all the while undisturbed by remonstrance or upbraiding from within. But when, at length, the prophet closed his parable with the stern and cutting words, "Thou art the man," conscience, the accuser, started from its trance, and read to the trembling king such a catalogue of crimes, that he could think of nothing but his iniquity. Whereever he went, this sense of guilt went with him. Do what he would, he could not drive it from his thoughts. "My sin is ever before me." Ah! what a fearful companion is a guilty conscience! What a dreadful sound rings in the ears of a man who, like David, has sinned against distinguished mercy and superior light! How he views and reviews the crimes that he

has done! How their aggravations rise at each new examination! The voice of conscience becomes more terrible than thunder, and its accusations sharper than the sting of a scorpion.

SECTION IX.

In the Case of the True Penitent, this Conviction is accompanied with Deep and Abiding Sorrow for Sin.

In David's case, this re-awakened sensibility of conscience was, through the grace of God, accompanied with genuine repentance. He openly and ingenuously confessed his guilt, with all its aggravating circumstances, in the sight of God: "I acknowledge my transgression." His sense of sin was so deep and pungent, that he was continually revolving it in his mind. His contrition was no slight and transient emotion, but a profound and abiding sorrow. "My sin is ever before me." "The acts of repentance, even for the same sin, must be often repeated. It is good for us

to have our sins ever before us, that thereby we may be kept humble, may be armed against temptation, quickened to duty, and made patient under the cross." (*Henry*).

SECTION X.

The True Penitent mourns for Sin chiefly as committed against God.

The sharpness and burden of David's grief, in view of his sin, arose from this, that it had been committed against God: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." David had sinned against Bathsheba; against Uriah; against his family; against his own soul; against his throne and kingdom; against the church and the interests of religion. He had, indeed, sinned against men; but not as he had sinned against God. Hence that penitential wail, which seems to pierce the very heavens: "Against thee, O my God, my Saviour, my Deliverer, and the Lifter-up of my head, against thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in

thy sight. My sin against the church, against the nation, against my faithful subject and devoted friend, against my family, against my own soul,—great though it be in all these relations,—is, nevertheless, as nothing to this, that I have sinned against my God; that I have sinned in violation of the law, and under the very eyes of my Divine Patron, who took me from feeding sheep, and set me over his people Israel; who has covered me in the day of battle, redeemed my life from destruction, and crowned me with loving-kindness and tender mercies."

This was the thought, this the view of his sin, that broke, as it were, his very bones. And it is this which ever gives poignancy to the anguish of a repenting and returning backslider. "This (says Henry) should greatly humble us that they have been committed under the eye of God; which argues either a disbelief of his omniscience, or a contempt of his justice."

SECTION XI.

The True Penitent justifies God in his own Condemnation.

Borne down in this manner by self-accusation and self-reproach, and overwhelmed with a sense of the ill desert of sin, David owns the justice of the Divine sentence: "That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, (that is, from thy throne of judgment,) and be clear when thou judgest." Thus does this royal penitent justify God in the sentence passed upon him; and thus do all true penitents justify God by condemning themselves. It is the uniform effect of a right conviction of sin to make the sinner take part with God against himself. Nathan had threatened sore temporal judgments against the fallen king. But David, instead of murmuring at their severity, is only concerned for the Divine honour. He is ready to justify God in what he well knew would pierce his own soul with many sorrows.

Such a paradox is the Christian. He is an enigma, a bundle of contradictions, to one who has never been taught by the Divine Spirit to love God and abhor himself. David now loathed himself. This self-loathing was not, however, merely because of his out-breaking crimes, great as they were. It was, as we shall see in the next verse, much more on account of the source of his crimes in the corruption of his nature itself. From the profound of humiliation, he exclaims:

V. 5. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

SECTION XII.

The True Penitent bewails the Sin of his Nature, as well as of his Life.

The process of conviction, under which David was now passing, was as thorough as his transgression had been enormous. In conducting it, the Holy Spirit did not suffer him to stop at the mere surface of his sin. Passing beyond the external

breach of the Divine law, gross and complicated as this had been, the Spirit taught David that his guilt lay chiefly in that moral condition of the soul, of which adultery and murder were but the evidence and the expression. Nor might the convicted monarch stop even here, but was made to see and feel that even his lust and cruelty, his hypocrisy and treachery, were themselves but the issue of a principle more deep and hidden; a principle which contains the seeds and elements of all sin; a principle which is wickedness in the root and essence, and from which any and every enormity may be educed as circumstances offer the occasion. This principle, he confesses, was co-eval with his being. He had inherited it, together with his nature itself, from his progenitors: "I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."

Having confessed his actual transgressions, and sought forgiveness therefor, Da-

vid acknowledges and bemoans the sin of his nature, the inborn propensity of his soul to backslide from God, and rebel against his authority. This is an explicit and memorable testimony to the doctrine of original sin; the clearest and the most direct to be found in the Old Testament. It is a testimony which the enemies of that doctrine can neither evade nor subvert. It will not do to say that David is confessing the sin of his mother, and not his own; for if he had nothing to do with his mother's sinfulness, what had that to do with his case? He might as well have mentioned the sin of any other person. Still less will it do to assert, as some when pressed with this passage have asserted, that David is now under an excessive contrition; that the religion of the feelings has, for the time, overmastered the religion of the intellect; and that, in the vehemence of his self-condemnation and self-abasement, he exaggerates his sinfulness,

and charges his nature with a guilt which does not, in truth, belong to it.

A gloss like this casts a reflection upon the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, whose work it is to convince men of sin, and give them repentance unto life. If our nature is not a sinful nature, how can we be, as the apostle affirms, "by nature the children of wrath?" If we inherit no corruption, whence is that law in our members which wars against the law of our mind? If the flesh is not naturally at enmity with God, why is it impossible for those who are in the flesh to please God?

SECTION XIII.

The True Penitent regards the Possession of a Sinful Nature as in itself Sinful and Blameworthy, and as deserving God's Wrath and Curse.

David appears, from what follows, to have been fully persuaded that the possession of such a nature was sinful and blameworthy in the sight of God. He saw the law to be exceeding broad. He saw

that the law required perfect uprightness of heart, as well as innocence of life, and that the having a corrupt heart was in itself a want of conformity to its requirements. God gave our nature this integrity; God did not take it away; and not to require it, would be to allow sin in its very fountain. It would be, in effect, to sanction that from which all the rebellion in the universe has proceeded.

But whence this hereditary pollution? On what principle does it descend through the long procession of generations? Why does the angel of woe spread his dark wings over the genital couch, and, clapping them in triumph at our natal hour, shake down every malign influence upon the feeble heirs of mortality? It is a question for those to answer who deny our representation in Adam, and who maintain that he stood for himself alone, and that the guilt of his fall is not imputed to his posterity. If the doctrine involved in such a

denial is correct, then does God permit one of the heaviest of curses,—the curse of a nature prone to evil,—to fall upon the innocent heads of those against whom he has no complaint. The equity of such a procedure it is for the advocates of the doctrine in question to vindicate. But those who believe that Adam stood for all his descendants; that he was the federal as well as the natural head of the human family; and that, because of his transgression, judgment righteously came upon all men to condemnation, find no difficulty in that Divine constitution, which ordains that the race who shared in the sin should also inherit its consequences.

Since these things are so, "it is to be sadly lamented (says Matthew Henry) by every one of us, that we brought into the world with us a corrupt nature, wretchedly degenerated from its primitive purity and rectitude. We have, from our birth, the snares of sin in our bodies, the seeds of

sin in our souls, and the stains of sin in both. This is what we call original sin, both because it is as ancient as our original, and because it is itself the original of all our actual transgression."

SECTION XIV.

All Genuine Repentance is Spiritual, Heartfelt, and Sincere.

VER. 6. "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom."

The inward and hidden parts are mentioned as opposed to what our Saviour calls "the outside of the cup and platter," and denote the secret exercises of the soul in opposition to the mere outward manifestations of the life. David, so far from regarding the corruption of his nature as an excuse for sin, here acknowledges that this corruption is, in itself, sinful in the Divine view, and deserves God's wrath and curse. He does not trace back his sin to his conception and birth by way of

apology for it. Rather he hereby owns that from his very infancy, and because he sinned and fell in his federal head, he was justly liable to eternal death. To obtain the Divine approval, no fair pretence, no hypocritical profession, no round of external duties, no mere outward conformity to the law can avail. Sincerity, reality, a heart purged of all guile, in a word, truth in the inward parts, is an indispensable condition of such approval. Secret as well as open sin, sin in the heart, no less than sin in the life, draws down the displeasure of a holy and heart-searching God upon those who practise it. And all genuine repentance is spiritual, heart-felt, penetrating to the inward parts, even to the very core of our spiritual being, and going down to the profoundest depths of the soul.

SECTION XV.

The True Penitent feels that his having sinned against Knowledge is an Aggravation of his Guilt.

The second clause of the verse, "in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom," Calvin translates, "thou shalt show me wisdom in secret;" that is, a hidden, divine wisdom, the effect of an inward illumination of the Holy Spirit. He considers the Psalmist as aggravating his offence by a confession that he could not plead the excuse of ignorance. He had been sufficiently instructed in his duty.

God, by his Spirit, had revealed to him the secret mysteries of his wisdom. Nevertheless, he had presumptuously and grossly transgressed his law. His sinning despite this clear knowledge of the Divine will, so graciously imparted, was a great aggravation of his offence. David felt it to be so, and, with deep penitential sorrow, confessed both the sin itself and this grievous aggravation of it.

SECTION XVI.

David's Exercises to this Point summed up and improved.

To this point in the record, the great Genevan thus sums up and improves the exercises of the penitent monarch: "We have thus set before us the exercise of the Psalmist at this time. First, we have seen that he is brought to a confession of the greatness of his offence. This leads him to a sense of the complete depravity of his nature. To deepen his convictions, he then directs his thoughts to the strict judgment of God, who looks not to the outward appearance, but the heart. And, lastly, he adverts to the peculiarity of his case, as one who had enjoyed no ordinary measure of the gifts of the Spirit, and who deserved, on that account, the severest punishment. The exercise is such as we should all strive to imitate. Are we conscious of having committed any one sin? Let it be the means of recalling others to our recollec-

tion, until we are brought to prostrate ourselves before God in deep self-abasement. And if it has been our privilege to enjoy the special teaching of the Spirit of God, we ought to feel that our guilt is proportionably heavy, having sinned in this case against light, and having trampled under foot the precious gifts with which we were entrusted."

SECTION XVII.

The True Penitent looks to Atoning Blood as the only Medium of Forgiveness.

VER. 7. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

David here continues the same strain of supplication for pardon and cleansing as he had used before; but he adds an intimation as to the ground and method of forgiveness, viz: through atoning blood.

God is one. His attributes are ever the same. Consequently, the mode of pardon, which these attributes render necessary at

one time, must be equally necessary at another. It will be the one and only mode revealed, at any time, to mankind.

Atonement is the Divinely appointed medium of forgiveness. Atonement, therefore, has been the great object of the church's faith from the beginning. Atonement, as a ground of pardon, acceptance, and reconciliation, was very clearly revealed in the sacrifice of Abel. The expiatory nature of Abel's offering is the reason why it is called by the apostle "a more excellent sacrifice" than Cain's, which was merely eucharistic; that is, a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Atonement pervaded every part of the Levitical law. It was most distinctly shown in the rites prescribed by Moses for the cleansing of a leper. To these rites there is a manifest reference in the verse before us.

The mode of purification was the following: Two birds, alive and clean, were to be brought to the priest, with cedar wood,

scarlet, and hyssop. One of the birds was to be killed in an earthen vessel over running water. After the living bird, together with the cedar, the scarlet, and the hyssop, had been dipped in the blood of the slain bird, the blood was to be sprinkled upon the leper seven times. Then the priest pronounced him clean.

In these rites, some have seen an allusion to several things pertaining to the mediation of Christ. The two birds have been viewed as representing the two natures of Christ; the slaying of the first bird in an earthen vessel, as intimating the sacrifice of his human nature; the dipping of the living bird in the blood, as declaring the value given to this sacrifice by his divine nature; and the hyssop and cedar, as showing forth the fragrance, acceptableness, and perpetual efficacy of the offering.

These analogies are probably rather fanciful than solid; and have more of re-

finement than of instruction. But however this may be, it is evidently to the better sprinkling of the blood of Christ that David here alludes as the only application which could cleanse him from the leprous defilement, of which he was now so painfully conscious. It is as if he had said: "I feel myself to be a leper, O my God and Saviour. Sin has eaten into my very bones. I am covered all over with its loathsome defilement. But even a leper may be cleansed by thy almighty power and thy sovereign grace. Apply, I beseech thee, the efficacious, all-purifying blood of the atonement to my soul. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

"To purge with hyssop," says the late Prof. J. A. Alexander, "necessarily suggests the idea of a purification founded on atonement, as the hyssop was employed to sprinkle purifying substances, and some-

times mingled with them. Whiter than snow is a natural hyperbole, denoting perfect purity."

The purgation and washing, referred to in this verse, represent our being cleansed from our iniquity by the atonement of Christ, in order to our re-admission to the Divine favour. It is the peculiar work of the Holy Spirit to sprinkle our conscience with the blood of Christ, and, by removing the sense of guilt, and consequent dread of Divine wrath, to re-awaken our confidence in God, and secure our access into his presence.

It was, then, on the ground of atonement through the blood of the Redeemer, and that alone, that David prayed and looked for the blessing of forgiveness. His prayer, "purge me with hyssop," translated into the language of evangelical or gospel supplication, is: "Purge me with the blood of Christ, applied to my soul by a lively faith, even as the blood of

the Levitical atonements was sprinkled upon the leper with a bunch of hyssop, or the water of purification upon a person who had been defiled by the touch of a dead body." It is the blood of Christ alone, called by the apostle in the Hebrews, in allusion to these ceremonial cleansings, "the blood of sprinkling," in other words, the atonement applied to our souls by faith, that removes the guilt of sin, washes out its stains, purges the conscience from dead works, and frees the penitent from that remorseful dread of God, which shuts out the soul from communion with him, even as the taint of leprosy or the touch of a dead body shuts a man out from the courts of God's house. Purged by atoning blood, we shall be clean indeed. Washed in this fountain, we shall be, according to the prayer of the royal penitent, "whiter than snow." We shall be absolved from guilt, accepted in the Beloved, and justified freely by God's grace; so

that, though, as the prophet speaks, "our sins have been as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they have been red like crimson, they shall be as wool." It is upon this ground only that any repentant sinner can hope for the Divine forgiveness, and enjoy that "peace in believing," which is the effect of a true and genuine reconciliation to God.

SECTION XVIII.

The True Penitent desires the Comfort of Pardon, and the Joy of conscious Reconciliation to God.

VER. 8. Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.

David here advances a step further in his petition. Having ingenuously confessed the actual transgression with which he had been charged; having traced his iniquity to its original in the possession of a corrupt nature, inherited from the root and stem of the human race; having bitterly bemoaned both the sin and its source; and

having earnestly sought forgiveness and cleansing through the blood of the Redeemer; he now fervently prays for the comfort of pardon, and the joy of conscious reconciliation to God.

In the latter clause of this verse, the penitent monarch presents a vivid picture of the anguish which he had experienced under the threatenings of the Almighty, and the convictions of his own conscience.

The figure, by which he conveys that anguish to our apprehension, is bold, impressive, almost startling, viz: that of living bones broken and crushed under some violent and irresistible power. Nor less vivid and striking is the picture which he offers of the joy of sin forgiven, under the image of those same bones rejoicing in the sense of recovery and restoration to soundness and health.

"This joy," says Calvin, "he describes as to be obtained by hearing; for it is the word of God alone which can first and

effectually cheer the heart of any sinner. There is no true or solid peace to be enjoyed in the world, except in the way of reposing upon the promises of God. Those who do not resort to them may succeed for a time in hushing or evading the terrors of conscience; but they must ever be strangers to true inward comfort. And, granting that they may attain to the peace of insensibility, this is not a state that could satisfy any man who has seriously felt the fear of the Lord. The joy which he desires, is that which flows from hearing the word, in which he promises to pardon our guilt, and re-admit us into his favour. It is this alone which supports the believer amidst all the fears, dangers, and distresses of his earthly pilgrimage; for the joy of the Spirit is inseparable from faith."

SECTION XIX

The True Penitent longs for a Sense of the Divine Forgiveness and Favour.

VER. 9. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.

To hide the face from sin, is not to see it, not to look at it. To blot out iniquity is to expunge it from the memory, even as debts are expunged from an account book, or as a cloud is dissolved by the sun. What David here asks with respect to his sins is, that God would graciously cancel them, and remember them no more against him. The form of the petition represents our justification as consisting in a voluntary act of God, by which he condescends to forget all our iniquities, or to act towards us as if they were forgotten; and it represents our cleansing to consist in a gratuitous pardon of transgression.

The continual repetition of the Psalmist's requests for Divine mercy in the for-

giveness of his sins, shows how earnestly he desired that great boon. It evinces the depth of that anxiety which he felt for a favour which his conduct had rendered difficult of attainment. The man who prays for pardon in a cold and formal manner, is thereby proved to be a stranger to the odious nature and dreadful desert of sin. "Happy is the man," said the wise Solomon, "that feareth always."

SECTION XX.

The True Penitent desires Sanctification, as well as Justification; he longs for the renewing and purifying Influences of the Holy Spirit.

VER. 10. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

David continues his prayer, but with a change of subject. He passes from the remission of sin to sanctification. Hitherto, he had prayed for pardon; now, he begs for the renewing and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit.

"Create in me a clean heart." The word

here is the same as that used in the beginning of Genesis to denote the production of the material universe by the fiat of omnipotence. We are here taught that the regeneration of a sinner and the recovery of a backslider alike require the exertion of Almighty power; that neither can be effected by anything short of a special divine operation; and that both renewing and restoring grace is the free gift of God. "He only that made the heart," says Matthew Henry, "can new-make it; and to his power nothing is impossible. He created the world by his power, as the God of nature; and it is by the word of his power, as the God of grace, that we are made clean, that we are sanctified." It is not that we are weak simply, and need some Divine assistance; but that we are utterly without strength or ability to heal ourselves, and must remain destitute of all purity and all righteousness, until they are gratuitously imparted from above.

The production of spiritual good in a sinful heart is everywhere, in the Scriptures, represented as a work of God's creative power. "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." The new man is, "after God, created in righteousness and true holiness." Indeed, it can not be otherwise, unless darkness can turn itself into light, and death communicate to itself a principle of life. And the reproduction of this spiritual good when partially lost, its revival when ready to perish, is as much an act of Almighty power as its original implantation.

This fact a Christian comes by degrees to discover and to understand. After many foolish and painful experiments, he is brought to this plain truth,—though very humiliating to our pride, and very difficult to be received, because of our self-love and our self-flattery,—that all our springs are in God. The soul of a believer

is a cistern, not a well; and must be filled from without, rather than from any inward source. It is a cup with holes, and must be kept at the fountain, if we would keep it full. A Christian is never so safe as when most sensible of his absolute and entire dependence. "When I am weak," said an eminently wise and experienced believer, "then am I strong." This is a paradox to the world, but not to the humble disciple of Jesus, who, like Paul, gladly glories in his infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon him and be manifested in him.

David was brought to the recollection and realization of this truth by a sorrowful experience, resulting from gross and long-continued wickedness. With broken bones, with an anguished spirit, and with the deepest self-abasement, he makes his application unto God. He confesses the entire corruption of his nature, renounces self, and despairs of all recovery of holi-

ness from anything less than a direct exertion of Almighty power.

SECTION XXI.

The True Penitent desires Steadfastness in Duty, but feels that he is dependent therefor wholly upon Divine Grace.

In the latter part of the verse, David prays that God would "renew a right spirit within him," which plainly intimates that he had previously been made a partaker of the Holy Ghost. Some render: "Renew a steadfast spirit within me;" that is, a mind firm and steady in following the path of duty. As he could not recover himself, so neither could he preserve his own standing. A Christian is to follow Christ, and to run in the way of his commandments; but this he can do only by his Divine grace. The moment he attempts to go in his own strength, he will stumble and fall. Christ must not only raise him up, but hold him up; for he who has no strength to rise, can have

but little strength to stand. The same Almighty arm that lifted him up, must keep him from falling. The grace of Christ is as needful to preserve spiritual health as to impart it. His work is not a mere making us clean; it is a keeping us clean as well. He must deliver us from our corruption, not less than from our guilt. He must be the finisher of our faith, as well as its author. David felt that, if a right spirit were given him, he should lose it again if he relied upon his own strength for its preservation. He therefore supplicates his God, not only to bestow such a spirit, but to confirm it; not only to renew it, but to make it steadfast and abiding. The sense of his weakness and dependence causes him to deprecate, as the greatest of all judgments, God's abandonment of him to himself. Hence his fervent prayer in

VER. 11. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.

SECTION XXII.

The True Penitent dreads the Withdrawal of the Divine Presence, and especially the Loss of the Spirit's Influence.

"Wo unto them," says Jehovah, speaking of ancient Israel, "when I shall depart from them." Such departure marks the last stage of human ruin. It is the awful prelude and preparation for final judgment. When Jerusalem, after so many respites, was at length abandoned to destruction, a voice is said to have been heard in the temple: "Arise, let us depart hence." So, when the Holy Spirit leaves his abode in any human bosom, the damnation of that soul is sealed, and the fires of perdition cannot be far distant.

But on this subject let us beware of hasty conclusions; nor infer, from this petition of a trembling penitent, that the Lord will cast off his people, or abandon, finally and for ever, any one of his elect. This cannot be. The seed of the word is

incorruptible and immortal. The attributes of God, the covenant of redemption, the perfection and merit of the Redeemer's work, the power of his grace, the nature of justification, and the plain, certain, and reiterated promises of the Divine word, all forbid such an idea. Faith and salvation are, by the decision of Holy Scripture, inseparably connected; and what God hath joined together let not man put asunder.

But while, on one hand, this truth remains inviolate and sure, the bulwark of our hope, the palladium of our safety, and the crowning benediction of our state, it is certain, on the other hand, that from souls where the Holy Spirit has done much in illumination, conviction, persuasion, and remonstrance, much in warning, restraining, prompting, and strengthening, he may, notwithstanding, be driven, not for a time merely, but for ever. It is certain that men, who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made,

in a sense, partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, may yet fall away. And it is as certain that the perdition of such will be unspeakably aggravated by all the mercy they have resisted, rejected, forfeited, and finally lost. "The last state of that man," says the great and infallible Teacher, "is worse than the first." Have we forgotten the name and history of the apostate Spira? Can his emaciated frame, his haggard features, the rolling of his baleful eyes, his unquenchable thirst, his perpetual and restless tossings, his attempts at self-murder, and his visions of the torments of hell ever cease to make us shudder in every limb? Can we forget that a man who was once the enlightened, fervent, powerful, and dreaded advocate of Christ's truth, was brought at last, through an utter and irrecoverable apostasy, to this blasphemous thought and declaration: "I

would I were above God, for I know he will have no mercy on me!" Well, then, might David, well may every one of us, offer the prayer, "Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me."

SECTION XXIII.

The True Penitent longs for Peace with God, the Joy of his Salvation.

VER. 12. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation: and uphold me with thy free Spirit.

The penitent king found the way of transgressors hard. His soul was solitary and sad. Short pleasure had brought long pain. The headlong impetuosity of passion left him, when its force was spent, but a melancholy retrospect of the peace which it had destroyed. He now longed for that serenity, that quietness, that inward springing up of joy and hope which once he had known, but which had become a stranger to his bosom. Sin met him at the throne

of grace, and hid the light of the Divine countenance from his soul. Under the sense of his privation, and in the remembrance of happier days, relying upon the grace and faithfulness of a covenant God, he prays, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." "He cannot dismiss his grief of mind," says Calvin, "until he has obtained peace with God. This he declares once and again, for David had no sympathy with those who can indulge themselves in ease when they are lying under the Divine displeasure."

SECTION XXIV.

The True Penitent desires Deliverance from the Bondage of Sin, and the Enjoyment of the Liberty wherewith Christ makes his People Free.

In the latter clause of this verse, David prays, as in the preceding verse, that the Holy Spirit might not be taken away from him: "Uphold me with thy free Spirit." Thy FREE Spirit—where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty; and whom the

Son makes free, he is free indeed. David had a painful sense of the bondage into which his sin had brought him, and he prays that he may be released from this thraldom, and endued with a free, cheerful, joyous spirit, spontaneously choosing and resolutely pursuing the Divine service.

SECTION XXV.

The True Penitent offers Vows of Thanksgiving to the Lord, and promises to show Gratitude for Recovering Grace by Seeking the Conversion of Others.

VER. 13. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

The Psalm consists properly of two parts, a prayer and a vow. In the former, as we have seen, David seeks the pardon of his sin, inward purity, reconciliation to God, peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost: in the latter, he declares the manner in which he would show his gratitude for the Divine favour in granting his petition.

Here begins the second part: his vows

of thanksgiving, the expression of his grateful feelings in view of the answer vouchsafed to his cries. Having made his confessions, spread out before the Lord his misery, deprecated destroying judgments, supplicated a restored sense of pardon and peace with God, he here utters his vows. He first declares his purpose to testify his gratitude by seeking the conversion of others. "Then will I teach transgressors thy ways." To this he was prompted alike by love to God and love to man; by zeal for the Divine glory and sympathy for the lost and the perishing among his fellow-creatures. Those who have been made partakers of the grace of God cannot but desire that others should share in the same blessing.

In this declaration of his purpose to teach transgressors the ways of the Lord, David shows his own heart and the heart of every true child of God, as much as in any other part of the Psalm. His main

concern is for God's glory in the salvation of men. His first wish is that his sins, his sorrows, his sufferings, his repentance, his recovery, and his whole experience as a reclaimed backslider, may be made subservient to this high and noble end. David was a "nursing father" to the church. He was one of those rare monarchs who consider themselves as reigning for God, who view the presence and prayers of God's people as the best pledge for the safety of their throne and kingdom, and who look upon the prosperity of his cause as both their glory and their strength. Hence, one of his bitterest reflections, evidently, was that he had, by his fall, deeply wounded the interests of religion, and given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.

But he comforts himself with the hope of healing the wound. "Sinners," he says, "shall be converted unto thee." "The sanguine manner in which he expresses

his expectation of converting others," observes Calvin, "is not unworthy of our notice. We are too apt to imagine that our attempts at reclaiming the ungodly are vain and ineffectual, and forget that God is able to crown them with success." In all probability he will do so if such efforts are honestly and faithfully put forth.

SECTION XXVI.

The True Penitent repeats, again and again, his Prayer for Deliverance from the Guilt of Sin.

VER. 14. Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.

In the midst of his vow of thanksgiving, David sends up another prayer for pardon: "Deliver me, O God, from blood-guiltiness." This declares the depth of his agony in view of his guilt, and shows how severe must have been the struggle of his soul with inward terrors. The blood of Uriah lay heavy on his conscience, and

he longed to have it cancelled by atoning blood. The strength and vehemency of his address,—"O God, thou God of my salvation,"—intimates at once how tremblingly alive he was to the danger of his situation, and how strongly his faith terminated upon God as the ground of his whole hope.

SECTION XXVII.

The True Penitent delights in the Exercise of Praise.

David adds a declaration of the way in which he would express his gratitude for the bestowment of the favour sought: "My tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness." By "the righteousness of God" is here meant, probably as in many other places of Holy Writ, his goodness, his grace, his faithfulness in fulfilling his promises, and in extending help to all who seek him in the hour of need. The reference, however, may be, and some think is, to the imputed righteousness of the Sin-

Bearer. This is in full accord with the entire spirit and doctrine of the Psalm.

"My tongue shall sing aloud." David kept that vow. We hear, athwart the ages, the sublime strains of his harp and voice, as, with holy exultation and enthusiasm, he sang: "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise."

VER. 15. O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.

This verse is but a repetition, in another form, of the preceding one; and, therefore, little need be said in explanation or illustration of it. David's lips would be opened by an answer to his prayer for pardon. Thus matter of praise would be afforded him, and his mouth should be employed in proclaiming it. Here again he signifies the gratitude which he would both feel and express in case his petition were granted; intimating that he sought the mercy of God with no other view than

that he might become the herald of it to others. He proceeds:

VER. 16. Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt-offerings.

SECTION XXVIII.

The True Penitent makes little Account of mere External Observances in Comparison with Right Exercises of Heart.

It was David's settled conviction and uniform teaching,—we find it running all through the Psalms,—that right exercises of the heart, and the sincere expression of them, were more acceptable in the sight of God, and more efficacious in procuring his favour, than the most exact and minute observance of ceremonial rites. "I will praise the name of God with a song," he declares in the 69th Psalm, "and will magnify him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the Lord better than an ox or bullock that hath both hoofs and horns." Hypocrites and formalists always lay great stress on externals; saints never

do. And, notwithstanding the number, solemnity, and imposing splendour of the rites of the Levitical law, notwithstanding their Divine original, and all the promises attached to their observance, the faith of the Old Testament saints rose above them, even to that better blood-shedding which should be accomplished upon Calvary. "Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" was language which they well understood. In the spirit of that language, and with a solemnity and tenderness peculiar to himself, David further speaks in the next verse.

SECTION XXIX.

The True Penitent is penetrated with a Profound Sorrow for Sin, which he regards as more acceptable to God than all mere Ceremonial Observances.

VER. 17. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

Under these natural and striking figures we have, vividly portrayed, a profound sorrow for sin, which is declared to be

more acceptable to God than all the oblations of the law. A precious truth, unspeakably precious to every truly penitent soul. Not, indeed, that there is merit in our tears, or that repentance is the price of forgiveness, and so to be put in the place of our Saviour. But unfeigned contrition, being the work of God's own Spirit, is ever acceptable to him. Its tears, though not meritorious or propitiatory, are most precious in his sight. Its sighs, though depreciated and derided on earth, find their way to heaven.

SECTION XXX.

The True Penitent desires and prays for the Prosperity of Zion.

VER. 18. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem.

David here returns again to petition; not now, indeed, for himself; but for Zion, for the whole household of faith. By the walls of Jerusalem we are to understand,

doubtless, the living stones in that spiritual temple which cannot be reared by human industry and skill.

But who would have looked for such a prayer in such a composition? Who could have anticipated that a Psalm, so intensely personal, would have so catholic a conclusion? Who would have supposed that a penitential Psalm, composed under guilt, and fear, and shame, would end with a prayer for the church universal? Yet even in this hour of his extremity, David can mingle with his own dearest hopes a prayer for the prosperity of Zion.

Here again we see the heart of a Christian. Men may think as they please, but a true Christian loves the church as such. It is God's church. It is his own spiritual mother. It contains all his Christian brethren. It is the sanctuary of truth on the earth. It is the nursery of souls for heaven. In Zion God delights to dwell. In Zion is found almost all the real virtue

which earth contains. In Zion the believer has obtained his brightest hopes. In Zion he finds his best enjoyments. The victories of Zion are the conquests of truth; her prosperity is the welfare of mankind; her success, the world's salvation; her glory, the glory of God. She is the purchase, the inheritance, and the kingdom of him whom the Christian owns as his God, and loves as his Elder Brother. And how is it possible that he should do otherwise than love her? "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning: if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy." Such was the language of the church's faith at Babylon, even when her harp was upon the willows. It is strong language; but it has its echo, however faint, in every bosom where Jesus dwells.

SECTION XXXI.

The True Penitent loves and prizes the External Worship of God chiefly as it is an Expression of the Inward Exercise of Faith, Repentance, and Thanksgiving.

VER. 19. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt-offering and whole burnt-offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.

That is, when Zion should be enlarged, the walls of Jerusalem built, and religion in a prosperous state, then God would look with complacency upon his people, and be pleased with the solemn ordinances of his own appointment. "In these words," observes Calvin, "there is an apparent, but only an apparent, inconsistency with others, which he had used in the preceding context. He had declared sacrifices to be of no value when considered in themselves, but now he acknowledges them to be acceptable to God, when viewed as expressions or symbols of faith, penitence, and thanksgiving. He calls them, distinctly,

sacrifices of righteousness,—right, warrantable, and such as are offered in strict accordance with the commandment of God. The whole of this verse has been figuratively applied by some to the kingdom of Christ; but the interpretation is unnatural, and too refined. Thanksgivings are, indeed, called by Hosea 'the calves of the lips,' but it seems evident that, in the passage before us, there are conjoined, along with the frame or disposition of the heart, those solemn ceremonies which constituted part of the ancient worship."

These ceremonies pointed to the Lamb of God, and derived all their spiritual efficacy from their relation to him. The faith of David, as of the whole ancient church, terminated on the blood of atonement, which was to be shed on Calvary. Classic mythology tells of a fountain of such wondrous virtue, that he who laved in its waters became instantly endowed with immortality. In the Scripture this beautiful

fiction is realized. Christ has opened a fountain, which not only cleanses from every impurity those who wash in it, but imparts to them the vigour and beauty of immortal youth. Here the leprous soul washes, as Naaman washed in the waters of Jordan, and finds himself purged of every stain. Here the blind wash, and, like the man from Siloam's pool, return seeing. This is the true Bethesda, whose waters are always efficacious, from the overshadowing of the angel of God's presence. The lame, the halt, the blind, the paralytic,—"whosoever will,"—may take their healing power as a free gift. Into this fountain it was that David plunged in this hour of sin, and shame, and dread, and found his soul cleansed from blood-guiltiness, and, from being blacker than midnight, made whiter than snow. The waters, gushing from the rock smitten by the rod of Moses, pointed to this spiritual stream, which springs from the Rock of

Ages. No barriers fence around this blessed fountain. The middle wall of partition has been broken down by Jesus. "And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come, and let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "The last invitation in the Bible," said the sainted McCheyne, "and the freest; Christ's parting word to a world of sinners."

The Lessons of the Psalm stated in brief Propositions drawn immediately from the Text.

1. The true penitent is really and deeply humbled on account of sin; and, renouncing self and all self-righteous claims to the Divine forgiveness and favour, he takes refuge in the free, rich, and sovereign mercy of God; and trusts in that mercy alone for the pardon, of which he feels himself to be in perishing need, ver. 1.

2. He feels that his guilt, being infinite, as committed against an Infinite Lawgiver, needs an infinite clemency to cancel and remit it, ver. 1.

3. The true penitent desires sanctification as well as justification; the cleansing of his nature no less than the forgiveness of his sin, ver. 2.

4. His sense of sin leads to an open and ingenuous confession of his guilt. His contrition for sin is so pungent and profound, that he is ever recurring to it in thought, and revolving it in his own mind. The recollection of his guilt follows him wherever he goes, so that his sin is ever before him, ver. 3.

5. He feels the guilt of sin chiefly as a breach of God's law, and as an insult to his purity. However much he may, by his transgressions, have wronged his fellow-men, he still regards every sin as rebellion against the authority and majesty of Heaven; and it is this consideration

which most affects and distresses him, ver. 4.

6. Sensible of the ill desert of sin, and ever ready to acknowledge it, he freely justifies God in the condemnatory sentence passed by his law upon himself, ver. 4.

7. The true penitent not only acknowledges his actual transgressions, but feels, confesses, and bewails the corruption of his nature. Conviction, with him, is a deep and thorough work. He traces back the stream to the fountain. Original sin, as well as personal guilt, is a grief and burden to his soul; and on both grounds,—the corruption of his nature and the corruption of his life,—he "abhors himself, and repents in dust and ashes," ver. 5.

8. He does not regard this corruption of his nature as any excuse or apology for transgression, but, on the contrary, as itself offensive to God, and as meriting and receiving his displeasure, ver. 6.

9. The greater the light and higher the

privileges previously enjoyed by the penitent, the more aggravated and enormous does his guilt appear to him, and the more profoundly does he prostrate himself before God in self-abasement and self-loathing, ver. 6.

10. He longs for purity, as well as for pardon; for holiness, no less than for peace. He desires and prays for these rich blessings, not for his own righteousness' sake, but only on the ground of atoning blood. The experience of his impotence and inability to obtain them by his own efforts, puts vigour into his prayer that he may be purged by the blood and Spirit of Christ, and so made clean, yea, even "whiter than snow," ver. 7.

11. The true penitent desires not only pardon, but the sense of pardon. He longs for the joy which springs from conscious reconciliation to God, and which is obtained only through the Divine promises revealed in the Divine Word, ver. 8, 12.

12. The true penitent is importunate. He does not pray for forgiveness in a cold and formal manner, but repeats his petition again and again, as one who feels how hateful sin is in itself, and how great its demerit in the sight of God, ver. 9.

13. He, moreover, longs to be made holy, and, once and again, employs the language of fervent supplication to that end. A "clean heart" is the object of his passionate entreaty and diligent pursuit. His great concern is to get his corrupt nature changed and made pure, ver. 10.

14. He desires not only pardon and purity, but constancy also. He would have not only a right but a steadfast spirit, ver. 10.

15. Sensible of his own weakness, the true penitent desires the continual presence and aid of the Holy Spirit. He dreads the natural proclivity of his heart to backslide; and prays and struggles against becoming a "castaway," ver. 11.

16. He would be delivered from the bondage of sin, and have a name and place among the Lord's freemen. He would possess a noble, ingenuous, and liberal disposition, a free and cheerful spirit in the service of the Lord, ver. 12.

17. The true penitent is sincerely thankful for the blessings of forgiveness and acceptance. He testifies his gratitude by efforts to effect the conversion of others; and he has faith to believe that God will prosper his attempts at reclaiming the ungodly, and will crown them with success, ver. 13.

18. He shows his thankfulness not only by efforts to teach transgressors the ways of religion, but also by a devout celebration of God's goodness, and a heartfelt utterance of his praise; to the end, especially, that others may thereby be incited to the same holy and delightful exercise, ver. 14, 15.

19. While hypocrites and formalists are

ever inclined to rely upon ceremonial observances and external duties, the true penitent regards right exercises of heart, and particularly godly sorrow for sin, as most acceptable in the sight of God, and most efficacious in securing his favour, ver. 16, 17.

20. He has an ardent love for Zion, and fervently desires and prays for her enlargement, prosperity, and secure defence, ver. 18.

21. The true penitent, though he does not trust in the appointed ordinances of religion, does, nevertheless, faithfully observe and sincerely delight in them. He looks, however, through all mere outward observances to the blood of sprinkling. His faith, rejecting all mere legal righteousness, terminates on the great propitiatory sacrifice which was, once for all, offered upon Calvary for remission of sins and justification unto life, ver. 19.

SECTION XXXII.

Conclusion.

Let us now, in conclusion, sum up the results of the whole discussion, and present, in miniature, the portrait of the true penitent.

David, an eminent prophet and saint, as well as king, had sinned and fallen grievously in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah. For more than a year, he seems to have lain under an amazing stupor of conscience. At length, the Divine benignity, proposing his restoration, sent Nathan to rebuke him for his sin, and warn him of his danger. Conviction instantly flashed upon his soul, and its pungency was equal to its suddenness. No sooner had the prophet withdrawn than David retired to his closet; and his soul, smitten as with the rod of God, poured forth floods of penitential grief. It was upon this occasion, and under the influence of his

re-awakened sensibility, that the Psalm was composed which has formed the basis and theme of the foregoing treatise, and which is a model to the church for penitential devotions through all the ages.

David begins his suit for pardon by taking refuge in the Divine mercy, which he extols in exalted strains, and with much copiousness and warmth of expression. But pardon alone does not satisfy his desire. He wants cleansing—thorough cleansing—cleansing from all sin. Filled with humiliation and self-loathing, and owning the justice of a condemnatory sentence, he pours his confessions into the ear of a gracious God; being chiefly troubled, not because he had wronged his fellowmen, though his guilt was great in that regard, but because he had broken the Divine laws, and offended the Divine majesty. Nor was David satisfied with confessing his actual transgression; but, in expressions of the deepest self-abasement,

he mourns the corruption of his nature as the root and principle whence that and every other sin proceeds. He acknowledges that this original sin deserves punishment, since God requires truth, purity, and sincerity in the hidden parts, in the very texture and substance of the soul, to which nothing can be more opposed than the taint and depravity drawn, through our parents, from our federal head. Renouncing, therefore, all self-righteous hopes, he sues for the pardon of his guilt and the removal of his impurity, on the ground of atoning mediation and imputed righteousness. Having experienced the deepest anguish under the sense of his guilt, and earnestly implored absolution and restoration to the favour of God, he seeks, in reiterated petitions, the joy of pardon, which he hopes to obtain only through the promises of the Divine Word. Sensible of his own weakness and inconstancy, he sends up earnest and repeated cries for

the presence and help of the Holy Spirit. In the latter part of the Psalm, he utters his solemn vow of thanksgiving. He promises, if pardon be granted and peace restored, to cherish a grateful sense of the Divine goodness, to testify his gratitude by efforts to convert transgressors, and by a public celebration of God's praise, and so to become a herald to others of the Divine mercy. He then declares, in copious and animated strains, his conviction of the superior acceptableness of inward penitence over all mere external observances. And he closes with an earnest prayer for the prosperity of Zion, and the expression of his ardent and devoted love for the church and her appointed ordinances.

This love of the church is an affection older than the birth of time. It had its origin in heaven. It was in heaven before the earth was formed. It came down incarnate in the person of God's eternal Son. It shone in his life, and breathed in his

expiring cry. It descended again at Pentecost. It rested with the holy flame upon the heads of the apostles, and spake in those tongues of fire which proclaimed to all peoples the wonderful works of God. It bore the heralds of the cross through labours and sufferings which would, otherwise, have been intolerable. It made them willing to live or to die, and it hallowed the blood of their martyrdom. This love produced the heroes of the Reformation. This love still supplies the church with her faithful ministers. This love gives to talent its highest direction, to learning its most noble use, to wealth its best employment. As surely as this love is in you, professing Christian, it marks you as belonging to the family of the Most High. It gives you communion with patriarchs and prophets; with martyrs and confessors; with the good and the pure of all times and all places. And, while you are acting under its influence, it makes you a

helper of Christ, a fellow-worker with God himself. Pray, then, with David, for the peace of Jerusalem; and the Lord shall fulfil to you his faithful promise, that they shall prosper who love Zion; who take pleasure in her stones; and to whom her very dust is precious.

THE DOCTRINE OF REPENTANCE,

AS DECLARED

IN ACTS xvii. 30.

BY

E. C. WINES, D.D.

THE DOCTRINE OF REPENTANCE.

THE doctrine of repentance is set forth, in brief but pregnant terms, in the address of St. Paul to the Athenians on Mars' Hill, as recorded in the seventeenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, and in the thirtieth verse:

> God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.

This inspired declaration contains the following points:—the duty of repentance; the authority which enjoins the duty; the time when the duty is to be performed; the urgency of the duty; and its universality.

It is proposed, in these pages, to offer a short, practical discussion of the points here specified.

May the Divine Spirit first aid the endeavour, and then make it fruitful.

SECTION I.

THE DUTY OF REPENTANCE.

General Nature of Repentance.

The word repentance, in the original language of the New Testament, signifies an after-thought. It denotes a change wrought in the mind and intention by a retrospect of our past life. This change begins in the intellect, the seat of knowledge. It pre-supposes a right apprehension of God, of ourselves, of the deep corruption of our nature, of the heinousness and hatefulness of sin, and of our need of pardon and cleansing through the blood of Christ. The eyes of the understanding are opened to see the evil of sin, as it is opposed to the spotless purity of God; and the danger of sin, as it is calculated to arm his justice against us; and also to see how sin has pervaded the whole man; how it has dishonoured every part of the Divine law; and how Jehovah himself regards it.

But, though repentance begins in the understanding, where it must have a foundation of knowledge, it does not end there. It extends to all the faculties of the soul,—the conscience, the affections, the will, and the active powers. When God, in Christ, is presented in all his attractive beauties to the divinely-enlightened mind, the heart springs forward to embrace him with desire, love, and gratitude such as it never felt towards any other object. "I will arise and go to my FATHER," is the instinctive thought of the true penitent; "Whom have I in heaven but thee?" is the spontaneous and irrepressible emotion of his soul. When sin is viewed, by a mind so illuminated, as committed against a God of infinite love and purity, as breaking each most sacred tie, and as trampling upon every obligation which binds man to his Creator, Benefactor, Redeemer, Sanctifier, and Judge, the heart, smitten by this sight, pours forth floods of penitential

sorrow. The whole soul is melted down, and gives vent to its emotions in the unaffected language of grief and self-abhorrence. Job and Jeremiah have given utterance to its penitential exercises in fitting words: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." "I lie down in my shame, and my confusion covereth me; for I have sinned against the Lord my God."

False and True Repentance Distinguished.

There is a repentance called by St. Paul "the sorrow of the world which worketh death." The grief in which it consists may be pungent and bitter; but it springs from no gospel principles, entertains no gospel aims, and is controlled by no gospel motives. It is but another name for remorse of conscience. It is a slavish terror of Divine wrath. It proceeds from horror

of the judgment-seat. It dreads the award of distributive justice. It fears God, not as a Father, but as a Judge, ready to pour out the vials of his indignation. Escape from hell is its only anxiety. The pure joys and holy employments of heaven have no attractions for the soul which knows only this legal or natural repentance. This sort of repentance may be produced by the mere principles of unrenewed nature, without the supernatural and regenerating influence of the Divine Spirit.

Not such is that "godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto life." This springs from a just sight and sense of sin, and from faith in the Divine mercy through a Redeemer. It is sorrow for sin as committed against God, and as contrary to his holy nature and law. It is a fruit of the Spirit; a saving grace; a precious effect of covenant mercy; and a bright evidence of the new heart. Among Christian graces,

it is second in importance to faith only. Though posterior to faith in the order of nature, it is simultaneous with it in its acts; and the two are inseparable. An impenitent believer is such another contradiction in terms as a square circle. We might as fitly talk of a proud humility, or a sinful holiness, or a loving hatred, as of an unrepentant believer. Repentance springs into exercise at the moment when spiritual life is imparted, and evidences itself in the exercise of saving faith.

The Change wrought in Repentance Four-fold.

Repentance, as before observed, denotes a change of mind and intention, consequent upon a deliberate review of our past conduct. This change is four-fold: It is a change of apprehension; a change of feeling; a change of purpose, and a change of life.

Repentance is a Change of Apprehension.

The eyes of the true penitent are opened

to discern wondrous things out of the Divine law. A new and divine light shines upon the sacred page, and illumines the depths of his own soul. God, Christ, the Bible, sin, holiness, time, eternity, heaven, hell, and all other spiritual truths appear to him as they never appeared before. He has a new and delightful apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ. He has an intimate and cheering conviction that there is forgiveness with God, and plenteous redemption through a crucified Redeemer.

Repentance is a Change of Feeling.

The apprehension of Divine mercy and forgiveness, noticed in the preceding paragraph as the first element in repentance, excites penitential grief, and makes tears of godly sorrow flow. True repentance, however, is not a superficial sigh. It is not a mere passing emotion, like the cloud that weeps a few drops in the morning, but disappears before the ascending sun. It

is a pungent, bitter, lasting sorrow. It is a sorrow that hates the sin for which it weeps. It is a sorrow called, in Scripture, "a weeping sore," a "weeping with bitterness," a "rending of the heart," a "breaking of the spirit." David sorrowed thus when he mourned for his adultery and murder. Jeremiah sorrowed thus when his eyes became a fountain of tears over the sins of his nation. Peter sorrowed thus when he wept bitterly over his shameful denial of his Master. The expression of this sorrow will vary according to the age, sex, and temper of the subject of it. The repentance is not to be measured by the tears, but by the grief; and the grief not by the sensitive trouble, but by the hatred of sin; a hatred which must be universal and irreconcilable, extending to all sins, and to sin at all times.

Repentance is a Change of Purpose.

With the true penitent, self is no longer

the centre of his motives, nor the main scope of his actions. God has now become his centre and supreme good. The man's chief object is at length in harmony with his chief end: to glorify God and enjoy him for ever. Relying on the promised aid of the Holy Spirit, and the strength of Christ his Saviour, he resolves to break off his sins by righteousness, and his iniquities by turning unto the Lord. In true repentance, there is a deliberate and settled purpose of obedience to the Divine commands. Of this, David is an eminent example. After an humble confession of his sin, and a passionate entreaty for pardon and cleansing, conscious of the Divine forgiveness, he announces the pious resolution of a penitential heart: "I will teach transgressors thy ways;" "my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness;" and "my mouth shall show forth thy praise." (Ps. li. 13–15.) And again, in another place, but to the same purport, he says: "I

thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies." (Ps. cxix. 59.)

Repentance is a Change of Life.

Obedience is the crown and perfection of repentance. In this, true repentance mainly consists. This alone affords evidence of a genuine grief for sin, and a cordial hatred of it. There must be a turning from all sin in heart and life; a turning from all temptations to sin; a turning especially from easily-besetting sins; a resisting the outbreaks of sin; a watching against all occasions of sin. "True repentance," says quaint old Jeremy Taylor, "must reduce to act all its holy purposes, and enter into, and run through the state of holy living, which is contrary to that state of darkness in which, in time past, we walked. For to resolve to do it, and yet not to do it, is to break our resolution and our faith, to mock God, to falsify and evacuate all the acts of apparent repent-

ance, and to make our pardon hopeless, and our hope fruitless. He that resolves to live well when a danger is upon him, or a violent fear, or when the appetites of lust are newly satisfied, or newly served, and yet, when the temptation comes again, sins again, and then is sorrowful, and resolves once more against it, and yet falls when the temptation returns, is a vain man, but no true penitent, nor in the state of grace; and if he chance to die in one of these good moods, is very far from salvation; for if it be necessary that we resolve to live well, it is necessary we should do so. For resolution is an imperfect act, a term of relation, and signifies nothing but in order to the actions. It is as a faculty to the act, as spring to the harvest, as eggs are to birds, as a relative to its correspondent,—nothing without it. No man, therefore, can be in the state of grace and actual favour by resolutions and holy purposes; these are but the gate and por-

tal towards pardon; a holy life is the only perfection of repentance, and the firm ground upon which we can cast the anchor of hope in the mercies of God through Jesus Christ."

SECTION II.

The Authority which enjoins the Duty of Repentance.

It is GOD who commands "all men, everywhere, to repent." Consider the greatness and majesty of the Being who has laid this duty of repentance upon us. He is the self-existent and infinite One, to whom belong all power, wisdom, knowledge, and dominion. It is he who said, "Let there be light, and there was light." He formed the earth by his power; he stretched out the heavens by his understanding; he governs all things by his wisdom. He upholds all things by the word of his power, preserving them the same amid perpetual change. All the works of men are subject to decay. Time

sweeps away the proudest monuments of human greatness. Castles, palaces, temples, cities, and even the more ethereal and beautiful creations of genius are destroyed by its ruthless hand. But the sun shines with undiminished splendour; the earth renews her fertility from year to year; the ocean swells and subsides at the appointed times; the stars hold on their courses; the tribes of men and animals rise in perpetual succession; and all the operations of nature move on with the same order and regularity as when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy, as the green earth, in the freshness and perfection of its infancy, was launched from the hand of Omnipotence. Nor is the power of God less displayed in the moral government of the world. What fearful passions are at work around us,—pride, malice, envy, revenge, hate, avarice, sensuality, and blood-thirstiness! We walk, as it were,

among heated ploughshares and smothered fires. Nothing but the might of Omnipotence could hold men and devils in check, and prevent them from turning the universe into one vast and dismal scene of disorder, misery, and ruin. Lo! these are parts of his ways, but how small a portion of him is known! So great, so mighty, so glorious is the Being who lays his command upon us to repent. How dreadful must it be to provoke his wrath by disobedience! "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," except we have made a covenant with him by sacrifice, and are clothed in the clean linen of the saints, even the spotless robe of the Saviour's righteousness.

SECTION III.

The Time when the Duty of Repentance is to be Performed.

The command is, NOW. "Now is the accepted time, and the day of salvation;" "to-day if ye will hear his voice, harden

not your heart." Reader, what is your life? The sport of frailty and inconstancy; the life of an insect or a blade of grass. Job compares it to a shadow, a post, a weaver's shuttle, a swift passing ship, and an eagle hastening to his prey. David compares it to a flower, a hand-breadth, a mere vanity and emptiness. Isaiah compares it to the grass, the fading leaf, and the rapid wind. St. James compares it to a vapour, a morning mist, that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away. And St. Paul likens it to the shifting scenes of a theatre; a pageant, that flits before the eye, and vanishes for ever from its sight. To-day is ours; to-morrow, God's. This day, this hour, this instant, may fix the destinies of eternity. But even if the uncertainty were less, if life, and health, and reason were held upon a long and secure lease, it would still be madness to defer repentance. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?

then may ye also do good which are accustomed to do evil." (Jer. xiii. 23.) It is not an easy thing to root out habits which are the growth and product of a whole life of sin. "We find work enough to mortify one beloved lust, in our very best advantage of strength and time, before it is so deeply rooted, as it must needs be at the end of a wicked life." The work will then be great, and the strength little; the increase of the one, and the decrease of the other, keeping an exact proportion. This is the reason why so few conversions take place after the meridian of life; and, next to the uncertainty of life, it is the strongest and the loudest call to immediate repentance that can be urged upon the sinner's attention and regard. Will not the younger portion of my readers lay the lesson seriously to heart?

SECTION IV.

The Urgency of the Duty of Repentance.

The obligation to repent is the result of a Divine command. "God now commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent." This is not mere counsel, persuasion, or entreaty. It is the voice of authority; the authority of the sovereign Lawgiver and Judge. How important must be the duty thus solemnly enjoined upon us by the Divine Being! Without repentance, perdition is inevitable; a perdition so dreadful that annihilation would be esteemed a blessing in comparison. But he that timely repents, confessing and forsaking his sin, shall find mercy; and, as the fruit of it, shall obtain the everlasting and glorious rewards of heaven. So great an excellency is repentance esteemed by God and the holy angels, that our Saviour tells us, that "there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth."

SECTION V.

The Universality of the Duty of Repentance.

The obligation reaches to "all men, everywhere." It is co-extensive with the depravity and sinfulness of man. The one is the measure of the other. What, then, is the testimony of Holy Scripture in reference to the extent of human depravity? "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God. They are all gone aside; they are together become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no not one." (Ps. xiv. 2, 3.) We have before proved, both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin. (Rom. iii. 9.) "The Scripture hath concluded all under sin." (Gal. iii. 22.)

This representation is confirmed by the concurrent testimony of all history and all experience. What havoc has sin made in the world, blasting the fair scenes of na-

ture, and converting the earth into an abode of crime and terror. The heart of man is the seat of numerous evil passions, which, needing but an exciting cause and a favouring opportunity, break out into violence, murder, treachery, injustice, oppression, fraud, and all the crimes by which the peace of nations and of neighbourhoods is disturbed or destroyed. That all men do not run into this excess of wickedness is owing, not to any difference of nature, not to any innate goodness of heart, but to the counteracting and restraining grace of God. On seeing a man convicted of a capital crime passing to the place of execution, the illustrious author of the Pilgrim's Progress exclaimed, "There, but for the grace of God, goes John Bunyan!" So may each one of us say of ourselves.

God commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent, because all men, everywhere, are sinners. He commanded Enoch, Noah,

Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, and Paul to repent. He has laid the same command on all generations of men. He lays it upon you and upon me. The obligation rests alike upon believers and unbelievers, upon the justified and the unjustified. The former, indeed, are not, properly speaking, in sin. They are freed from its guilt and condemnation; but they are not wholly free from its evil influence. Sin still cleaves to them, and will continue to cleave to them, as long as they are in a militant state. Hence they are the subjects of repentance as long as they remain in this world.

SECTION VI.

Application of the Doctrine of Repentance.

How alarming is the condition of impenitent sinners! The case of those who sleep while their house is in flames is sufficiently dreadful; but it is nothing to the sleep of the impenitent over the very brink

of eternal perdition. Their souls, suspended over the gulf of ruin, dream not of danger. Sin has sealed up their powers in utter insensibility. Ah! my dear impenitent reader, suffer the friendly expostulation. Will you longer postpone a present duty, imposed upon you by the command of your Maker, Lawgiver, and Judge? Will you brave the terrors of the Almighty? Will you turn away from a Father's face, beaming upon you in love and pity? Will you despise and resist the tender love of a bleeding Saviour? Remember that there is a turning-point in every man's existence. Every subject of God's moral government must be awakened at some period of his being. Every knee shall bow to God, and every tongue confess to him. Every mortal shall do him reverence, and mourn in bitterness of soul, either at the throne of grace or the throne of judgment. Blessed are they whose lot it is to be awakened in this life,

and whose false and legal hopes, slain by the terrors of the Divine Law, issue in penitential grief and contrition. But alas! for the finally impenitent! His awakening begins on a dying-bed, or in the gloomy valley of death, or at the bar of eternal judgment. He will then repent, but amid the unbroken darkness and horror of despair. He will weep endless, but unavailing tears.

"His hollow eyes will utter streams of woe;
There will be groans that end not, and the sighs
That always sigh, and tears that ever weep,
And ever fall,—but not in mercy's sight,
And sorrow and repentance and despair
Among them walk, and to their thirsty lips
Present the frequent cups of burning gall."

But to you, reader, this deep and hopeless darkness has not yet come. Mercy's voice still sounds in your ears. God, as a loving though offended Father, still waits for your repentance and return. His hand is stretched out for your salvation. Gladly would he hurry you away from the city of

destruction. Oh yield your heart to the gentle influences of his love, lest at an hour when you think not, his wrath, like a thunderbolt, crush your soul and hopes together into irremediable ruin.

"*Kiss the Son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little.*"

COMFORT FOR THE PENITENT.

COMFORT FOR THE PENITENT.

(A FRAGMENT.)

WHAT better can we do, than to the place
Repairing, where he judged us, prostrate fall
Before HIM, reverent, and there confess
Humbly our faults, and pardon beg; with tears
Watering the ground; and with our sighs the air
Frequenting, sent forth from contrite hearts, in sign
Of sorrow unfeigned, and humiliation meek?
Undoubtedly HE will relent, and turn
From His displeasure; in whose look serene,
When angry most he seemed, and most severe,
What else but favour, grace, and mercy shone?

MILTON.

IN the true spirit of his mission, our blessed Lord and Saviour began his first sermon, commonly called the Sermon on the Mount, with benedictions. Touched

with compassion at the ignorance, guilt, and misery that surrounded him, he opened his gracious lips, and blessings flowed forth. His words dropped as the dew. They descended, like balm, upon the sorrowing bosom. They fell like manna, satisfying the hungry with good things. Among the clustering beatitudes that breathed, like heavenly odours, from his lips, is one which promises peace and rest to mourning souls: "Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted."

The proposition seems unrestricted; but it has its limitations. The world is full of sorrow; yet not every one who sighs has a part in the blessing promised. The cause of the trouble must be considered. The world is full of sorrow, because it is full of sin; and it would be an inconsistency, a contradiction, to comfort transgressors, however great their sorrow, who still hug their sin, and remain incorrigible therein.

I have said that the promise of comfort to the sorrowing is not unrestricted. But whoever else may be excluded, the benediction certainly embraces those who, enlightened by a saving work of the Holy Spirit, mourn under a conviction of their sin and misery.

The natural condition of man may be illustrated by a comparison. A child is born and reared in a dark and sordid subterraneous abode. His ideas are necessarily formed from the objects around him. Having never seen anything more attractive, he grows up in a kind of sullen contentment. He hears that he is in a mine; but he has no proper idea of what that means, because he was never anywhere else. Now, let this child be taken to some elevated spot above ground, where he may view an extensive landscape of field and grove and stream and herd and the towers and palaces of a splendid city in the distance. What an influx of ideas! What

an enlargement of mind! What a revolution and elevation of thought! He has learned now what it is to have a subterranean home; and with what loathing does he look upon its darkness, its deformity, its filth!

A change no less radical, a revolution no less complete, takes place in the views and sentiments of a man to whom the Holy Spirit has revealed the true nature of his state as a sinner. He was once, like the child we have imagined, in a sort of stupid contentment with his condition. He was as well off as others. He knew no better state. When he heard of a happiness springing from religion, which earthly fountains cannot yield, it seemed to him a dream, a fancy, a delusion. There might, possibly, be some truth in it. But he questioned; he doubted; he hesitated; he wavered. And, at any rate, whatever faint degree of credit he might, at times, feel inclined to give to the statement, it

failed to awaken any interest in his mind. But when he discovers, by a light which brings its own evidence, that he is an enemy to God, a slave to sin, condemned by a righteous law, and exposed to endless ruin; then it is that he finds grief and trouble. And this trouble arises from conviction of sin. Sin brings guilt; guilt brings condemnation; and condemnation brings punishment. The awakened sinner is made sensible of all this. The threatenings of God's law are brought home to him. He is made to realize that God is angry, and that his wrath is dreadful. He was alive without the law once; but now the commandment enters, sin revives, and he dies. The world, till now all sunshine and fascination, is become a weariness and a blank. As he surveys his past life, there rises to his view a long train of slighted mercies, of neglected opportunities, of heaven-daring and heaven-provoking transgressions. Horror and anguish take hold

upon him when he looks back upon himself, a wretched worm, interpenetrated with sin, as meal is with leaven, trampling upon the law, trifling with the gospel, chasing every bubble, and held out of the pit only by a patience as wonderful as it was gracious. He has learned his true character, and God is become a terror to him. Oh, that inexorable Judge, those flaming eyes, that unrelenting law! He toils and struggles to work out a righteousness of his own; but resolutions, promises, vows, and efforts, of whatever kind, are all in vain. At every fresh attempt, a deluge of new transgressions overwhelms his hopes. Before him are the shades of death; within, a torturing memory and an accusing conscience; and behind, that terrific voice, "Pay me that thou owest." The world is empty; peace is fled; joy is withered; and even hope, that last comforter of the wretched, spreads her wings, and flutters to be gone.

Sin-stricken weeper, raise your drooping head! Look up through those streaming tears, and read,—for it is graven upon the rock,—"Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted." Behold, One like unto the Son of man draws nigh; and, with a voice in which majesty is blended with tenderness, he addresses you: "I have heard thy groaning, and seen thy tears. I am sent to bind up the broken-hearted, and to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. I have magnified the law, and made it honourable. I have obeyed its precept and suffered its penalty in thy room and stead. Behold, I bring near my righteousness for thy acceptance. Receive it, and live."

Weary and heavy-laden mourner, does your heart leap at this call? Do you take the gracious Redeemer at his word? Do you rest on him alone for salvation? Do

you cling to his cross by faith? Do you cleave to him in love? Does your heart, smitten by the rod of God, send forth the flowing waters of penitential grief? Do you abhor all sin? Do you loathe it as you would a dead body fastened to your person? Do you long to have the work of repentance perfected in you? Do you labour to attain the evidence of a genuine and godly sorrow for sin in a growing holiness of heart and life? Then shall your peace be like a river; and the Angel of the Covenant shall comfort you as one is comforted of his mother. Then shall the clouds scatter, and the refreshing beams break forth, and come streaming into your soul. Then shall the benediction of the Lord be yours; and he will surely comfort you with satisfying and everlasting consolations.

'Tis enough. Let the sure, the precious promise of the Divine Consoler sink into your heart. Embrace it with a faith that

knows no wavering. Cling to it with a hold tenacious as the grasp of death. In due time you shall know all its truth and all its sweetness.

THE END.

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